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ABSTRACT

This digest is adapted from Linda Cohen's publication, "Meeting the Needs of Gifted and Talented Minority Language Students." It explores the controversy surrounding the underrepresentation of minority language students in gifted and talented programs and makes recommendations for more suitable assessment techniques and program models. Addressed are the following questions: (1) Why are minority language students underrepresented in programs for gifted and talented students? (2) What are some commonly used techniques for the identification of gifted and talented minority language students? and (3) What types of programs are available for gifted and talented students, and are they suitable for minority language students who are selected to participate? Specifically described are enrichment programs, parent involvement programs, acceleration or honors programs, and mentor programs. The following recommendations are made: broaden the concept of giftedness; expand research on giftedness and minority language students; employ more well-rounded assessment techniques; increase staff awareness of their potential for developing a gifted and talented program; explore various program models; and increase awareness of different ways giftedness may be manifested in different populations. Includes 17 references. (DB)

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED MINORITY LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Students with special gifts and talents come from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Gifted students can be described as possessing an abundance of certain abilities that are most highly valued within a particular society or culture. Many minority language children have special talents that are valued within their own cultures; unfortunately, these students are often not recognized as gifted and talented.

Most procedures for identifying gifted and talented students have been developed for use with middle class children who are native English speakers. Such procedures have led to an underrepresentation of minority language students in gifted and talented programs, which in turn prevents our schools from developing the strengths and abilities of this special population.

This digest explores the controversy surrounding the underrepresentation of minority language students in gifted and talented programs and makes recommendations for more suitable assessment techniques and program models.

Why are minority language students underrepresented in programs for gifted and talented students?

Educators who work closely with minority language students argue that using standardized IQ tests as a primary measure of giftedness does not fairly accommodate the linguistic and cultural differences of these students. These educators look to identify the "able learner" rather than the more narrowly defined gifted student who scores in the top 3% on IQ tests. Able learners are defined by some educators as students in the top 10% of their class who have shown some extraordinary achievement in one or more areas such as science, mathematics, or the performing arts (Ernest Bernal, personal communication, September 13, 1988).

Reliance on IQ tests alone has greatly diminished the potential number of gifted students. Renzulli (1978) indicated that "more creative persons come from below the 95th percentile than above it, and if such cut-off scores are needed to determine entrance into special programs, we may be guilty of actually discriminating against persons who have the highest potential for high levels of accomplishment" (p. 182).

Three percent is a conservative estimate of the percentage of the population that is considered gifted. However, in Arizona, for example, only 0.14% of the students in gifted and talented programs come from language minority backgrounds (Maker, 1987). Using the 3% criterion, one would estimate that 2,900 limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in Arizona could be receiving some type of services for giftedness. An assessment of needs, however, revealed that only 143 LEP children were participating in gifted programs, despite the fact that minority language students represent 16.17% (96,674) of the school-age population. Other studies indicate that the proportion of Blacks, Hispanics, and American Indians identified as gifted represents only half that expected (Chan & Kitano, 1986).

Table 1 illustrates that, nation wide, Caucasians and Asians are overrepresented, while the percentage of Blacks and Hispanics is only half what would be expected in gifted and talented programs. The concept of giftedness as it relates to culture and values can help explain why more gifted and talented Asian and Pacific-American students have been identified than any other group. Although these children comprise only 2.2% of the school-age population, they constitute 4.4% of the identified gifted students, twice the expected number (Kitano, 1986). (This figure is slightly lower than the statistic given in Table 1 [2.5%]; but the table has more recent data.) The traditional Asian values of educational attainment and obedience to authority support achievement in U.S. schools, despite the fact that Asian and Pacific-American cultures differ in many ways from the majority culture.

Different learning styles may also contribute to the underrepresentation of gifted and talented minority language students. Native Americans are often caught between the schools' value of independence and the home and community value of interdependence. In school, students generally sit in rows and face the teacher, whereas in Native American culture, everyone would be seated in a circle and decisions would be made collectively.

Among many Hispanics, cultural differences may also produce manifestations of giftedness that differ from the traditional manifestations in the majority culture. In Puerto Rico, for example, children learn to seek the advice of their family rather than act independently (Perrone & Aleman, 1983). Respect for elders is often valued more than precociousness, which can be seen as disrespectful. Similarly,

Table 1. Percentage of Minority Students Enrolled in Regular Education Programs and Special Programs

Minority Group	*General Enrollment*	*Enrollment in Gifted Programs*
Caucasians	71.2%	81.4%
Blacks	16.2%	8.4%
Hispanics	9.1%	4.7%
Asians	2.5%	5.0%

Sources: Machado, (1987); Zappia, (1989)

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the Mexican-American child who respects elders, the law, and authority becomes vulnerable in a school system that values individual competition, initiative, and self-direction.

What are some commonly used techniques for the identification of gifted and talented minority language students?

Research on the identification of giftedness points to the lack of appropriate assessment procedures. Giftedness is not a trait inherent to native English speakers; however, there is a lack of instruments that can detect giftedness in minority language students (Gallagher, 1979; Llanes, 1980; Raupp, 1988; Renzulli, Reis, & Smith, 1981). Most tests rely on either oral or written language skills. Minority language students who are not considered gifted may, in fact, be very gifted, but unable to express themselves in English. Therefore, many researchers urge that great caution be exercised in using English standardized tests for the identification of linguistic and cultural minority students. These researchers also recommend selecting tests that reduce cultural and linguistic bias.

The identification and assessment of gifted and talented minority-language students is complex because it involves students who are both gifted and talented and from a language or cultural background different from that of middle class, native-English-speaking children. Many researchers and practitioners recommend multiple assessment measures to give students several opportunities to demonstrate their skills and performance potential.

Each school can establish its own relevant criteria to ensure that the screening process is appropriate for a specific target population. Moreover, an assessment team that is sensitive to their needs can represent the population to be served in the program. In addition, teachers can be brought into the identification process, because they have the opportunity to observe students in numerous academic and social situations.

An alternative to using English language standardized tests is the assessment of LEP students in their native language. These tests measure a variety of skills: creative thinking skills such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration; intellectual development based on Piaget's theory of development (Piaget, 1954; Piaget & Inhelder, 1973); language proficiency; and nonverbal perceptual skills of cognitive development.

Many school districts now include behavioral checklists or inventories, nominations, or related techniques to identify gifted and talented minority language students. Checklists usually compare or rate the student according to general descriptions or more specific examples of behavior deduced from characteristics of gifted persons. Many of these instruments are designed locally, are available from state departments of education, or are available commercially.

Other commonly used methods such as interviews, self-reports, autobiographies, and case histories can also be used to identify gifted and talented minority language students. Interviews are often scheduled as part of the identification or selection process to determine a candidate's general fitness for a program and provide information for instructional planning. The use of case studies to identify giftedness has been documented by Renzulli and Smith (1977) and is recommended because it relies on multiple sources of information about a student's performance. Although these procedures can be cumbersome, time consuming, and complex, they can provide the most valid basis for decision making.

What types of programs are available for gifted and talented students, and are they suitable for minority language students who are selected to participate?

There are as many different types of programs and instructional models for gifted and talented LEP students as there are different views of intelligence. The program models discussed in this digest demonstrate a wide range of suggestions for choosing a program for gifted and talented students and can stimulate ideas about the types of program that can be implemented. However, each district must implement the program that will best meet the needs of its gifted and talented minority language students.

Jean M. Blanning, of the Connecticut Clearinghouse for Gifted and Talented (1980), suggests that, in general, programs for gifted and talented minority language students should allow their students to

- pursue topics in depth at a pace commensurate with their abilities and intensity of interest;
- explore, branch out on tangents unforeseen when first beginning a study, without curriculum parameters confining them to a particular direction;
- initiate activities, diverge from the structured format, within a framework of guidance and resources appropriate for such exploration;
- ask questions about areas or aspects of studies and find answers which lead to more questions;
- experience emotional involvement with a project because it is based on interests and use of higher levels of ability;
- learn the skills, methodology, and discipline involved in intellectual pursuits and/or creative endeavors;
- think (interpretations, connections, extrapolations) and imagine (ideas, images, intuitive insights) to develop fully into their own products; and
- experience the use of intellectual abilities and senses necessary in all creative endeavors.

Enrichment Programs. The most common program model for gifted and talented students is probably an enrichment program, in which students receive instruction in addition to their regular classroom instruction. Enrichment programs provide learning experiences designed to extend, supplement, or deepen understandings within specific content areas (Dannenberg, 1984). Some enrichment programs provide academic services and cultural opportunities for gifted and talented students.

Gifted and talented LEP students at Louis S. Brandeis High School in New York City (Cochran & Cotayo, 1983) attend operas and museums and, in this way, become a part of American culture. Students have said that the program has made them feel "special," because they visit places they ordinarily would not. Another example of activities in an enrichment program would be to have students studying the prehistoric era see films on dinosaurs, draw pictures of them, and go to a natural history museum to see a dinosaur exhibit.

The decision as to whether or not to implement an enrichment program may be greatly affected by the school district's concept of giftedness. If giftedness is considered a quality to be measured through IQ tests, then perhaps an enrichment program would be seen as a "frill," because it does not concentrate strictly on academics. On the other hand, this program may be particularly appreciated by gifted and talented minority language students, since they often do not receive this sort of exposure to the arts in a standard instructional program.

Resource Rooms. Another program model uses a resource room, which is usually staffed by a resource teacher. Students may visit the resource room to do special assignments or to check out various educational games or puzzles. In a kindergarten/first grade gifted and talented program in Albuquerque, New Mexico (Beam, 1980), parents are also able to check out items for their children. The resource room provides an excellent opportunity for parents and students to bridge the gap between home and school. However, in many inner-city schools, special programs may be needed to obtain the desired levels of parental support. Also, the establishment of a resource room usually requires physical space for the room, sufficient operating funds, and a resource teacher who has expertise in the area of gifted and talented students.

The Hartford, Connecticut, program "Encendiendo Una Llama" ("Lighting a Flame") has been in operation since 1979 and uses a resource room, an after-school program, and a regular classroom component to provide services for gifted and talented minority language students. This program emphasizes language development in English and Spanish, high-level thinking skills, independent work and study skills, and development of creative thinking. It is an integrated program in which English-dominant children also participate. In each of the participating Hartford schools, the bilingual gifted and talented program is the only gifted program in the school, and all children are eligible to participate, regardless of their language background.

Parent Involvement Programs. Many programs include a strong parent involvement component in which parents can help support their children's development at home while the school can be used as an additional resource. Although it is important for all parents to be involved in their children's education, it is particularly critical to develop a strong link between the home and the school for gifted and talented minority language children.

Many programs provide parents with checklists to help assess their children. In addition, programs often provide booklets of home activities through which parents can encourage critical thinking and creativity.

Acceleration or Honors Programs. Many people associate acceleration or honors programs with gifted and talented programs. These programs may include skipping grades, early entrance, early graduation, credit by examination, nongraded classes, and advanced placement classes (Dannenberg, 1984). Some gifted students who seem bored in school may benefit from an accelerated program that provides an academic challenge and keeps them involved in school. However, it may be difficult to identify these students, who initially may not be seen as gifted.

Some educators who adhere to the narrow definition of giftedness as high IQ may not feel that an honors program is appropriate for students who fit the broader definition of the able learner. This attitude is refuted in the film *Stand And Deliver*, which is based on a true story about several minority language students at an inner-city school in Los Angeles. These students were not considered gifted by many of their teachers, yet they were the only students in their school to pass the Advanced Placement exams given by the Educational Testing Service for college credit in calculus. Their success can be attributed largely to their mathematics teacher, Jaime Escalante, who had very high expectations for them and refused to believe that they were unable to think critically simply because they were from low-income, minority language backgrounds. He encouraged their participation in these special advanced classes (held at night and on Saturdays in overcrowded, stifling classrooms) to prove to other students, the faculty, and themselves that they were intelligent. Moreover, these students gained new, strong, self-concepts, which inevitably improved their academic skills and gave them the courage and discipline to pursue a college education.

Mentor Programs. Another program model for gifted and talented education is the mentor program. Mentors provide role models for the students, giving them an opportunity to interact with adult professionals. Through the Higher Achievement Program in Washington, DC, elementary and junior high school students from low-income neighborhoods are tutored by volunteers 2 nights a week. To be eligible for the program, students must show a high level of motivation and pass a qualifying examination. One night each week is devoted to verbal skills such as reading comprehension, vocabulary, and writing; the second night is devoted primarily to mathematics and related skills. Critical thinking skills are stressed in all subjects.

The mentor program has many psychological and social benefits for the students and is a low-cost program if the school district recruits area professionals as volunteers. School districts located near universities can encourage them to establish a course in which official credit is given to university students who participate as mentors. If the mentors are sensitive to the needs of particular cultural and linguistic groups, they can provide positive role models for the students. The mentor program concept can be a solution to difficult budget constraints and has been used by numerous school districts around the country.

Recommendations for Change

The following recommendations may improve the assessment and educational programs of gifted and talented minority language students.

Broaden the concept of giftedness. Broadening the concept of giftedness to include able learners will allow for the identification of a greater proportion of gifted minority language students. A broader definition of giftedness may be the first essential step toward identifying and educating gifted and talented minority language students.

Expand research on giftedness and minority language students. Although there is a large body of literature on gifted and talented students in general, there is much less literature on gifted and talented minority language students. This may be because many researchers in the past did not consider minority language students as gifted, based on the traditional measure of giftedness as a high IQ score. Further research is needed on *all* the able learners in our schools, including minority language students.

Employ more well-rounded assessment techniques. If there is a lower-than-expected proportion of minority language students identified as gifted, then the identification and assessment process should be examined to determine why these students have not been identified. School districts may need to find creative solutions to the problem of how to identify gifted and talented minority language students by using nontraditional methods.

The identification of minority language students can include multiple criteria (with information from many sources) relevant to the needs of the population. Using multiple instruments can result in a more precise picture because it provides information about students from different perspectives. A combination of assessment instruments can help ensure that a student's ability to participate effectively in a gifted and talented program is adequately measured.

Increase staff awareness of their potential for developing a gifted and talented program. Regardless of the program model selected for implementation, administrators must first examine the resources they have within their school system. Upon entering the school district, teachers could be asked to complete a questionnaire about their abilities and interests and whether or not they would be interested in participating in a gifted and talented program. For example, a teacher who has played piano for 10 years might be interested in teaching a course in music appreciation. Administrators need to be aware of the unique talents within their own staff as they identify local personnel who may be able to contribute their time, effort, and expertise to gifted and talented programs.

Explore various program models. No single model can be recommended as the "best" instructional approach for gifted and talented minority language students, because each population is unique and each program has its own specific goals and objectives. The type of program implemented may depend on several issues such as the instructional model, the talents of the students, the number of gifted students identified, the talents of the professional staff, the availability of qualified personnel, the level of commitment of the school and school system, and budget constraints.

Increase awareness of different ways giftedness may be manifested in different populations. Many students are gifted or talented. Teachers face the challenge of identifying, developing, and supporting their students' talents. Although this may be a challenge, it is also a rewarding experience. Watching students grow to their fullest potential and knowing that, as the teacher, you have played an integral part in your students' growth are great personal and professional triumphs.

Conclusion

This digest highlights some of the current debates in the education of gifted and talented students focusing on the definition of giftedness, the assessment of gifted students, and the development and implementation of gifted programs. Providing appropriate gifted and talented programs for students from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds is a challenge that many school districts face. Since minority language students represent an increasing percentage of the total school population, meeting the educational needs of gifted minority language students is vital. All students, including minority language students, deserve the most challenging instruction possible.

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